2014-03-04

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Kelly, Peter

10.1080/03054985.2014.900484
Oxford Review of Education
Informa UK Limited

Oxford Review of Education
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/core20

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Published online: 21 Mar 2014.

To cite this article: Peter Kelly (2014): Intercultural comparative research: rethinking insider and outsider perspectives, Oxford Review of Education, DOI: 10.1080/03054985.2014.900484

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2014.900484

Oxford Review of Education, 2014
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2014.900484

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Intercultural comparative research: rethinking insider and outsider perspectives

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A commonsense problematic positions comparative researchers as either inside or outside cultures, or their situation is considered so as to acknowledge cultural fluidity and fragmentation. This article rejects the objectivism of these positions to provide a relational account. Using the lens of social practice theory, comparative pedagogy is analysed and a case study provided, where pedagogy is described as a socially situated phenomenon and research on pedagogy as a contested field. Three relations are examined: researchers to pedagogy in processes of data generation; researchers to theories of and empirical research about pedagogy in processes of analysis; and theories of and empirical research about pedagogy to pedagogy in processes of validation. Methodological insights into the status, legitimacy and limitations of research findings are discussed, and a view of comparative pedagogy as craft apprenticeship is presented.

Keywords: *comparative pedagogy*; *relational problematic*; *researcher positionality*; *social practice theory*

Why compare pedagogy?

Cultural comparison in social research allows one to learn from the experience of others (Phillips, 2000), 'by making the strange familiar we make the familiar strange' (Alexander, 2000, p. 27). It is also an appropriate method for illuminating the 'dialectic of the global and the local' (Arnove & Torres, 1999), how 'national and local cultures can and do play a significant role in mediating global influences' (Crossley, 2002, p. 82) and, in turn, how global, national and local influences are mediated in everyday practice (Hedegaard, 2009) such as teaching. This is my concern: the relation of teaching to its social and political context, which Alexander (2001) calls pedagogy.

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The commonsense comparative research problem

Crossley and Vulliamy (2006) challenge comparativists to account for the relation of researchers as inside or outside the cultures being researched. Each position can be seen both positively and negatively. Insiders bring potential insights into nuanced cultural signifiers, but their familiarity may lead to the recycling of dominant assumptions; outsiders bring a freshness of perspective, but may impose their own worldviews uncritically. For Crossley (2002) collaborative research and partnerships between insiders and outsiders can help research to be more sensitive to local, social constructions of reality.

Some doubt accounts of insiders and outsiders, arguing that behaviours deemed to be within cultures are often inconsistent and limits between cultures are often blurred (Nederveen Pieterse, 2004). Cultures, they propose, are fluid, forever changing, mixing and adapting as people with multiple affiliations move in and out of them. This analysis privileges border crossing and hybridisation, challenging the cultural essentialism of pervasive beliefs like national purity which, as Tikly (1999) points out, have helped maintain the insider–outsider binary; it is difficult to claim intrinsic meaning for the dynamic, transient and unbounded. It also challenges simple models of colonialist imposition; the hybridity of post-colonial cultures is recognised as being neither that of the coloniser nor the colonised. Recognising this dynamic view of cultures, Hellawell (2006) suggests it more appropriate to refer to degrees of insiderness and outsiderness rather than using the fixed categories of insider and outsider.

These accounts are set within what Lave (2011) calls a common sense problematic, where a problematic comprises assumptions about relations between people and the world, the nature of social being and knowing and the nature of knowledge. Despite rejecting cultural essentialism, hybridity accounts continue to objectify cultures, endowing them with an existence independent of the consciousness or activities of people. Whenever areas of social commonality are discerned as cultures, boundaries are invoked to identify limits to their extent, where one becomes another and a social transition occurs (see Pettinger, Parry, Taylor, & Glucksmann, 2005). Certainly, in the accounts hybridity theorists critique, the metaphor of a boundary brings both a physicality to notions of culture and a sense that effort is needed to cross from one to another, taking for granted that which is bounded. But even reference to fluid and changeable boundaries invites a realist interpretation. As such, hybridity theorists are accused of ignoring power relations (for example, Brah & Coombes, 2000), because these objectifications are taken for granted, masking their socio-political influence.

Lave (2011) suggests there are good reasons to challenge research set within a commonsense problematic. Often researchers and policymakers who make use of research findings divorce knowledge from the practices which bring about its production, and, in so doing, many take dualisms such as the separation of body and mind, doing and knowing, practice and theory and the individual and the social for granted. In seeking to develop decontextualised knowledge, research focuses on

generalising social being rather than understanding it as locally constituted. This sustains the development of 'one size fits all' policy models which often support dominant interests with little regard for the diverse needs across and within different communities. Indeed, models are often set within and so help maintain hegemonic power relations. A relational problematic counters these totalising tendencies:

> Instead of starting with a presumption of pre-existing bounded entities—whether spatial, social or individual—a relational approach attends explicitly to ongoing processes of constitution. This processual understanding, in turn, is grounded in a theory of praxis that asserts the inseparability of situated practices and their associated meanings and power relations. (Hart, 2002, p. 296)

So, Lave (2011) argues, whereas a commonsense problem focuses on the nodes in networks, irrespective of whether or not it endows these nodes with essential meaning, the converse problematic focuses on relations, but rejects the view that these lie between nodes. There are no nodes. Relations are what things are. Hence, social inquiry in this frame focuses on examining relations that make things what they are. This is the position I adopt here. Setting comparative research within a relational problematic which, rejecting objectivist and essentialist notions of culture, allows the exploration of how influence is exercised in everyday life, I re-describe my own and my colleagues' endeavours in comparing school pedagogy. In so doing I explore the status, legitimacy and limitations of this and similar comparative research.

Towards a relational comparative research problematic

For du Gay, Hall and their colleagues (1997) culture is the process by which meaning is produced, circulated, consumed, commodified and endlessly reproduced and renegotiated in society. As such:

> To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express their ideas, their thoughts and feelings about the world in ways which will be understood by each other. (Hall, 1997, p. 2)

Cultures are to be found in the views and behaviours, that is, the ways of being, common to groups of people, which I will call cultural practices to emphasise their material basis. Often, groups are constituted using objectified constructs like gender, ethnicity, nationality, social class or common interest or intent (maybe, all those who like a particular genre of music, do the same job or belong to the same political party). The association between groups and cultural practices may be loose or strong, but in many circumstances one informs the other. In sharing a location, for example, people may, in time, come to share certain experiences and, most likely, a degree of commonality in the way they see and act in the world; in so doing they may reify their belonging together by invoking notions like ethnicity, nationality or social class. In other words, socially shared views and behaviours originate in

group activity, being co-constructed by and distributed across participants and circumstances (Billett, 2001; Holland & Lave, 2009; Lave, 2011; Wenger, 1998). This is a social practice perspective.

For du Gay et al. (1997), identification is central to cultural practice. Wenger (1998) describes two processes which help make peoples's lives and the world in which they live meaningful. First, peoples's identification of themselves, other people and things in the world; with teachers, for example, the ways they see and stories they tell about themselves as teachers, and the schools and communities in which they work, including how they perceive colleagues, pupils or pupils' parents to see them. And second, people's identification with some things (like places, individuals or groups and artefacts or commodities) and against (or ignoring) others. Hence teachers may create, acquire, co-opt and interact with such things as classroom resources (tracking software for pupil test results, for example) in an iterative relation which, on the one hand, expresses (perhaps reinforcing a technicist view of teaching) and, on the other, constructs and reconstructs how they identify themselves (say, changing the stories they tell of themselves, as teachers align with and justify this technicism).

Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) discuss how, in their behaviours, people position themselves in relation to others and the world so as to advance their own interests. People work to further their own interests directly or indirectly by serving the interests of others. Positioning can be explicit or tacit in learned, embodied behaviours which have been successful in realising a benefit in the past. So, some experienced teachers have a presence in class which many novices lack, allowing them to communicate their confidence and authority through their demeanour. They benefit because students are more likely to cooperate with them. But people are also positioned by others (when, perhaps, expectations are assigned by teachers to pupils about how pupils should behave) and by circumstances (when, say, teachers' previous experiences in similar circumstances suggest to them the limits beyond which pupils will refuse to cooperate). And after repeated positioning, people may become inclined or dispositioned to adopt the same position in similar circumstances. So, like identification (which involves positioning), positioning interacts with places, individuals or groups and artefacts or commodities, in a mediating relation which affords or constrains and, in the case of technologies, for instance, advances or limits (or a combination of each) what can and cannot be done.

Du Gay et al. (1997) suggest cultural practices are regulated by discourses—explicit and implicit frames of meaning and 'ways of being in the world' (Gee, 2005, p. 7), and associated ways of apprehending and engaging with the world or worldviews—which control and govern meanings that are acceptable. I have suggested cultural practices (which can also be regarded as commonalities in aspects of identification and positioning within groups) are influenced by places, people and artefacts. Some influences, perhaps separately, but more often in combination such as when they share a discourse, may be stronger than others. Hence circumstances may together reinforce the discursive frame, afford the discursive revision of cultural practices or resist it.

Discourses privilege particular interests, and dominant discourses serve the interests of influential groups. For example, the techno-rationalist view dominating the discursive practices of national politics in England in recent years (Belfiore, 2012) is evident in the artefacts produced. These include requirements in schools for regular target setting based on aggregated student test scores (e.g. DfES, 2005), guidance provided by government agencies which recommends the increased differentiation of teaching based on children's success at tests (e.g. DCSF, 2008) and the production of resources which focus on personalised learning programmes (e.g. DFE, 2012). It is also evident in the expectations of parents (Ball, 2003). Whilst some teachers may hold more progressive views, perhaps valuing collaborative work, their awareness of pressures to individuate, which often benefit middle class more than working class students (Ball, 2003), may render it difficult for teachers to act in line with their professional preferences.

Influences are therefore differently weighted according to how they are socially and individually valorised; a legal requirement may count for more than a teacher's opinion to the contrary. But as there are many influences in any complex social context, some being incommensurate, people necessarily have to mediate across them. So, as du Gay et al. (1997) point out, the resulting cultural practices are fluid, being subject to constant influence and renegotiation. People participate in many social groups like the family, school or workplace, some broadly sharing cultural practices and some differing. All are subject to adaptation and change in response to shifting circumstances.

Interrelated social processes (du Gay et al. 1997) such as those described above lead people to construct, maintain, penetrate and dissolve boundaries between cultural practices (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) depending on their interests. This work around boundaries—or more specifically, 'boundary fetishism'—allows people to make meaning of and exert some control over their own lives and the lives of others. An example of this is multiculturalism, a position which objectifies cultures and boundaries often on the basis of ethnicity, seeing them positively as both signifying the diversity of communities and recognising the worth of individuals belonging to different social groups within those communities. Those calling for the assimilation of migrants, however, wish to subjugate minority groups by demanding their members adopt without changing the cultural practices of the majority. Social participatory accounts appreciate (indeed, take strength from) both the fluidity and fragmentation of shared expectations, ways of meaning making and acting, which, having originated in the interactions of those with differing views and behaviours, continue to be formed and re-formed by such interactions (Billett, 2001; Holland & Lave, 2009; Lave, 2011).

Codified research knowledge and knowledgeable participation in research

So, it is people who objectify, reify or socially construct entities as objects, investing them with a sense of pre-givenness (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). It is not just

cultures and boundaries which are constructed to further interests, in and through identification and social positioning—so are stories, histories, traditions and the like; indeed, all associated knowledge. These are cultural objects, the production, representation of meaning in and consumption of which du Gay et al. (1997) describe as central to cultural practice.

A central goal of academic research is to construct codified knowledge including research theories and models, methodologies and methods, and the findings of empirical and documentary studies which a common sense problematic would take to apply across contexts. For the most part codified knowledge resides in academic literature, and is recounted and reinterpreted in lectures, discussions and research groups. But social practice theorists (Billett, 2001; Holland & Lave, 2009; Lave, 2011) argue that knowledge develops in iteration with the processes of coming to know and knowledgeable participation or knowing in social activities like academic research. In the case of academic research, knowing is: co-constructed in negotiations across researchers (and, in some forms of research, those being researched) sharing an intention to do research; supported or constrained by the circumstances and resources available, including literature; in particular settings which might encourage some forms of interaction and not others. In their negotiations participants' previous embodied experiences and the sense they have made of them (which Holland and Lave (2009) call their *histories-in-persons*) are revealed in differences in positioning, how they identify themselves and the world and what they identify. Together participants construct and reconstruct (or interpret and reinterpret) existing and new codified knowledge through what Wenger (1998) describes as the constant iteration of reification and participation. Hence particular ways of knowing and their associated knowledge constructions (that is, cultural practices and related objects) are contingent, being specific to people and circumstances.

For clarity here, I use context broadly to describe participants sharing largely similar intentions or combinations of intentions (in this case, the context of research differs in intent from the context of teaching; but the broad intent of teachers in one national context, say to promote democratic citizenship, might differ from those in another whose focus is enhancing employability). Settings include physical or virtual places, perhaps with specified functions, resources and participants, to which contextualised cultural practices and objects are further adapted. Differences in circumstance or situation are, for the most part, combinations of context and setting.

This model allows for differences in the interpretation of codified knowledge objects such as theories, where researchers' previous experiences in research activity contribute to their particular readings. Being subject to different influences and the availability of different resources, particular circumstances afford particular readings. However, as researchers experience alternative readings in new contexts or settings, that is as their understanding is recontextualised (van Oers, 1998), so they become better able to adapt or reinterpret ideas, and when this happens often enough it opens researchers to the opportunities for meaning-making afforded by knowledge objects in a wide range of situations and so they become polycontextual

(De Corte, 1999). Both of these concern the representation of meaning in cultural objects (du Gay et al., 1997; Hall, 1996). But none of this should give the impression that processes are simple or contexts static.

In what follows I use the analysis presented so far to explore comparative pedagogy. I begin by considering the nature of cultural practices in research.

Research contexts and settings as contested fields

One way of understanding the contextualised cultural practices of research and how these are adjusted to particular settings is to understand the various influences across which researchers mediate and their relative significance. These can be mapped using a frame adapted from Hedegaard (2009). She proposes one can view activity in different settings from three perspectives, the societal, institutional and individual; to this I add one more, an international and cross-national perspective, which I will describe first.

The prevalence of and status given to international comparisons in policy making and the significance of international journals, conferences, funding opportunities and research collaborations has allowed international and cross-national agendas to influence directly the work of researchers, especially as international recognition brings esteem. But not all can contribute equally to the setting of agendas. Particular discourses and worldviews prevail, particular approaches to research and researchers from particular institutions are privileged, and the use of English as the *lingua franca* of such work acts not only as a control on access, it also valorises English language traditions and literature over others.

Clearly there is potential for overlap and interaction here between international and national influences; I am not seeking to bound these categories or those that follow. Nevertheless, for Hedegaard, a broad societal perspective seeks those cultural practices (and their implicit and explicit values, expectations and norms), which are promoted by the workings of society as a whole (the state, civil society, the globalised market). This includes those officially endorsed in laws, statutory instruments and government frameworks and guidance, those encouraged less formally through, for example, the workings of the academy and the media, each formed discursively. National policymaking and research priorities and those of funding bodies give importance to some areas over others. This is also the case for the influence of the cultural practices and objects of academic disciplines; encoded, in part, in the complex of published and reported theorisation and research in both international and national journals, conferences and media; and shaped by a process of academic review, and the workings of international and national research groups such as BERA and BAICE in the UK. In all this, international and national emphases may vary along with the practices and objects brought by a particular disciplinary gaze (say, psychological or sociological) on fields of inquiry such as education.

An institutional perspective identifies the cultural practices promoted by particular workplaces. In England the distinction between different university groups from research-intensive to teaching-focused or the nature of research centres within universities and the traditions they sustain will play their part in shaping the work of researchers. This may include those remnants of earlier national or institutional influences preserved in norms and expectations. Finally an individual perspective considers the complex relations between people and their immediate circumstances and will include the histories individual researchers bring from other aspects of their lives, from working in other settings and from their previous research work. But it is also important to recognise knowledgeable activity as contingent on the combination of participants and available resources in particular circumstances, even though the separate influence of each may be indiscernible.

Separating influences thus allows one to make sense of intricate webs of competing interests but hides their co-construction and co-dependency; in time, practices promoted by national guidance or disciplinary bodies may become established across institutions and adapted to particular circumstances. The cultural practices resulting from mediations across complex webs of factors are therefore dynamic. They are also socially situated. Hence research is not simply about bringing a perspective to bear on the world; it is the contingent outcome of negotiations across many agendas within a field.

Pedagogy as a socially situated phenomenon

My own comparative research concern is pedagogy and much of the research I have been involved in has been in European contexts. Pedagogy 'relates the act of teaching to the ideas which inform and explain it' (Alexander, 2001, p. 513); as cultural practice (du Gay et al. 1997) pedagogy is teaching set in the discourses which regulate it. According to Alexander (2009) there is little comparative research addressing pedagogy largely because of the difficulty in designing approaches which fully respect its complexity and seek analyses both within and across nation states. With an international group of colleagues (Kelly, Dorf, Pratt, & Hohmann (2013a)), I have helped develop a comparative research approach rooted in the work of Basil Bernstein who provides a discursive analysis of pedagogy.

Bernstein (2004) asserts that pedagogic practice emerges from the adaptation of discourses concerning, for example, the nature of knowledge, society, schooling, childhood, schools and classrooms, prevalent in official policy agendas and propositions emanating from less formal debates within civil society. Such discourses encourage the discursive revision of schooling through recontextualisation processes similar to those already mentioned. Further recontextualisation occurs in the setting of particular classrooms where, like researchers, teachers face many varied demands (for example in Denmark, Mortimore 2007; in England, DCSF, 2009), competing influences and goals (Ball, 2006). Also, not only are classrooms contested fields, they are also social spaces to which both teachers and students bring their own

agendas and dispositions. And they are physical spaces which are resourced to allow certain forms of practice and obstruct others. Pedagogy results in large part from teacher mediations across all these various situational factors, and therefore is itself situated in such circumstances. So, from the social practice perspective of Holland and Lave (2009), to understand classrooms and pedagogy is to understand the relations between what they call *enduring struggles*, *contentious local practice* and *intimate identities*. In this, teaching is not an individual endeavour on the part of teachers; rather it is co-constructed in reciprocal relation with the activities of students.

Linking Bernstein's analysis to Hedegaard, pedagogic practice is thus subject to international and cross-national influences, interpreted in relation to national circumstances through national policy and the advice or guidance of educationalists. Where national and institutional agendas promote some cultural practices over others, this can lead to noticeable differences in pedagogy between countries. In federal countries like Germany, a number of differences originate at *Land* level. Similarly a wide variety of school types and circumstances may promote common cultural practices within institutions which differ significantly between institutions. Finally individuals with the freedom to do so can influence greatly their own classrooms. It follows that when similarities are evident in international comparisons these indicate, not, as Alexander (2009) suggests, the universal in pedagogy, but rather where national, institutional and individual agendas have been strongly influenced by common, international and cross-national worldviews.

For the remainder of this article I build on this social practice analysis of research and pedagogy to form a relational account of comparative pedagogy. In their call for a process of reflexivity or self-examination by researchers, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) identify three relations: the objectifying relation between the researcher and object of research, in this case pedagogy; the social relation between the researcher and the codified knowledge under construction; and the epistemic relation between the object of research, again pedagogy, and the codified knowledge under construction. Consideration of each of these is important for those seeking to adopt an anti-essentialist and non-objectivist perspective, and demands more than autobiographical reflection and an unpicking of researchers' values and assumptions which are common in approaches to reflexivity. I now consider the objectifying and social relations, then account for validity and the epistemic relation in a recent pedagogic research project, and conclude by considering comparative pedagogy as craft apprenticeship.

Generating data: Researchers' objectifying relations to pedagogy

How might researchers explore the co-production and co-consumption of meaning by participants in the cultural practice of pedagogy? Ethnography is clearly a strong contender, being:

> social research based on the close-up, on the ground observation of people and institutions in real time and space, in which the investigator embeds herself near (or within)

> the phenomenon so as to detect how and why agents on the scene act, think and feel the way they do. (Wacquant, 2003, p. 5)

But the business of working in a research team to make comparisons (and later I argue working in teams allows valid comparisons to be made) requires a degree of structure which ethnographic explorations often lack. Nevertheless, building on ethnography, comparativists can use methods like documentary analysis, observation and interviewing which allow a rich and detailed consideration whilst to some degree letting researchers monitor their own influence on the exploratory process. From a social practice perspective, both observation and interviewing involve researchers in social events, where shared meanings are produced and consumed, within discourses and across the participants and circumstances of either the pedagogic or interview setting. It is researchers' interpretation, representation and recording of this shared meaning making which become objectified as data.

For the most part in data generation, researchers work individually and the history each researcher brings to pedagogic contexts and settings differs. Each observation or interview is a unique event in particular circumstances, co-constructed by participants. Thus, in relational accounts, researchers are neither outsiders nor insiders but co-participants in social activity. Yet researchers' explorations in a particular setting will be dependent on their fluency in the dominant language, awareness of ways of knowing and being shared by other participants, recognition of situational factors affecting pedagogy and familiarity with significant wider influences; researchers should, at least, recognise how unfamiliarity in any of these can limit their capacity to share understandings with other participants. Of course, this is the case for all participants in social activity; their individual contributions to and perspectives on socially shared activity will, in part, be unique. But in working together towards shared goals, contributions and perspectives are, to some extent, harmonised, adapted to changing circumstance and improved through a process which Lave (2011) calls apprenticeship.

An awareness of situational factors and wider influences includes both the background to government agendas in general and education policy in particular, and a view on education scholarship including the findings of research. In the research teams I have worked with, English researchers have often been familiar not only with dominant techno-rationalist policy agendas, but also with accounts of how teachers, individually or collectively, have adapted and sometimes resisted their imposition leading to variation in practice across schools. Danish colleagues have brought similar understandings about teachers' changing interpretations of democratic *Bildung* traditions in relation, say, to government initiatives responding to perceived international pressures. For each of us, such perspectives have informed our consideration of how aspects of pedagogy are promoted by international, cross-national and societal debates which relate to schooling, the discursive positions they represent and the demands they bring. But our experiences of the specific cultural practices and objects of schools and classrooms have also allowed us to be sensitive towards the complexity of institutional and individual demands within particular

circumstances. Yet cultural practice is subject to ongoing formative processes and intra-national stratification, fragmentation and diversity are often increasing; hence, the familiarity of all participants with pedagogic settings, including researchers, will always necessarily be partial. Nevertheless, participants' contributions and perspectives are transformed as they work together as apprentices towards shared goals (Lave, 2011).

It is important here to regard both observations and interviewing as together forming a shared enterprise. In observation the researcher's goals differ from those of teachers and students, but in the interview all parties can share the goal of making sense of incidents brought from the observation by the researcher or recalled by interviewees. In this shared enterprise it is vital researchers attend to power relations and attempt to reduce their framing of data generation, thereby allowing some parity of voice to participants. This concerns, in part, their role as observer or interviewer; after Kvale (1995), two comments pertain. First, reflexivity allows researchers to account, in part, for their influence on the data generated and attempt to reduce this. They can examine their own histories-in-person in part through their identifications of themselves as researchers, the theories they identify with and the expectations they have of the research setting. They can also examine how the agendas they are working towards affect their work. And second, as indicated, it is important to focus on generating data which would remain as close as possible to the pedagogic process. Hence, at least at the outset, unstructured observation and open interview questions can be used to try to avoid the crude imposition of researchers' agendas. Also researchers should distinguish questions in the interview which seek to describe classroom activity from those which prompt reflection on and the construction of meaning around this. Clearly such a separation is artificial, but seeking elaboration of observations and identification of specific examples can help focus interviews on the act of teaching rather than allowing interviewees to be largely driven by the socially shared conventions of interviews. And in so doing researchers can challenge their own theories and expectations, indeed, their preferred ways of knowing in relation to the research setting.

Co-constructing codified knowledge: recognising power in social relations

How can researchers analyse data so as to compare situated pedagogy without privileging some voices? This concerns social relations in the production of codified knowledge. Researchers may identify similarities with those contexts, settings and practices with which they are familiar, but it would be difficult for researchers working alone not to privilege their own views and preferred ways of knowing. Carefully chosen teams can bring a diversity of interpretations and experiences to the shared task of analysing pedagogy situated in the specific circumstances of settings like schools and classrooms and then comparing it across settings. They may better discern common discourses, debates, agendas and traditions, yet question subtleties of difference to explore how these are mediated locally. In our case

German and Danish researchers were able to explore cross-national variations in *Bildung*, which sees education as a process of personal formation bringing about the inner development of the individual. In this process, researchers consume existing theories and empirical work, interpreting and reinterpreting them, and produce new analyses or make new meanings of existing work and the data they have helped generate. These new meanings emerge from negotiations across and mediations by researchers in the contended circumstances of their work. They are crafted into findings, perhaps including new theorisations, and, normally, publications.

This approach assumes it impossible to construct a single way of adequately describing the world; different descriptions and analyses are situated within particular circumstances and discourses, and always subject to reconstruction, rejection and replacement. It is therefore an approach which embraces plurality whilst adopting a critical perspective, recognising that codified knowledge is contingent and that power relations underpin its construction and legitimation. Knowledge often serves the purposes of some social groups over others; in comparative work it is important to counter attempts to emphasise the weaknesses of some groups in relation to the values and norms of other more powerful groups, so that the first are seen as in deficit and in need of improvement (Said, 1978). Engaging researchers with diverse histories in an open and inclusive manner is one way of countering the tendency for processes to be dominated by already privileged voices, enabling collaborative teams to act in a broader range of interests.

So, as with data generation, researchers should attend to power relations in this process. Researchers occupy different worldviews and have different agendas in research negotiations, and it may be their interests are, at times, in competition with each other. Hence there is need for continued reflexivity concerning their histories-in-person as before, including the expectations they have of the analysis and the agendas they are working towards.

Further, teams need to work on inclusivity and attend to structural inequalities in voice. So, returning to the earlier example about the place of English as the primary international medium for communication, if left unchallenged this can increase the access researchers confident in English have to participate in international conferences and to publish their work, and can privilege the English language literature as a common base for international and cross-national work, with literature not available in English marginalised. In another example, researchers recognised for their international work might be allowed or indeed expect to drive the agenda in international teams because of their proven success. With no analysis of these potential power dynamics, research teams run the risk of supporting the colonisation of international and cross-national research by dominant worldviews.

Throughout, researchers must maintain clear links between their analyses and theorisations and the research settings and data generated; one should be constantly tested out on the other, bringing, 'theoretically informed empirical work and empirically shaped theoretical practice … into a constitutive relation' (Lave, 2011, p. 155). With regard to existing theories and empirical findings, these are also grounded in specific social and historical contexts or the outcome of particular

collaborations, and subject to revision over time. For example, much of Bernstein's research concerned English state schools and was developed over a period beginning in the 1960s. At times it has been adapted and reworked, both by Bernstein and his colleagues and by other academics. Hence there is no one authorised version of his theorisations. Further, his work is widely known and has been subject to recontextualisation in studies across the world. As such, it is fruitful to see his work not just as providing sociological insight into the formation of school pedagogy, but also as a starting point both for exploring differences in readings within and across researchers and for developing new interpretations. Similarly the disciplinary origins of theorisations and research should be accounted for. Whilst some teams may all identify closely with one discipline, say sociology, which provides a common grounding, this would differ in interdisciplinary teams which might bring disparate disciplinary perspectives together, perhaps allowing for innovation but ignoring fundamental epistemological tensions.

I have already suggested boundaries are socially constructed to serve particular interests, not objective entities separate from the research process. They can be defined for the purposes of comparison, whilst the work done by boundaries in social activity can also be examined as part of the research process. For example, in the comparative projects I have been involved in, comparison across nation states allowed for an examination of how societal factors such as the organisation of education, which is shaped by the nation state apparatus through legislation and guidance or the workings of civil society, promote certain forms of pedagogy; comparisons between schools looked more at the impact of institutional agendas and circumstances.

It is also possible for comparisons between nation states to look at political and social imperatives for boundary maintenance. Debates in some European countries in recent years linking the numbers and behaviours of migrants to concerns about social solidarity (Nederveen Pieterse, 2007), and the role schools can play in tackling these concerns are a case in point. In some countries the preservation or dissolution of institutional boundaries (such as the maintenance of a tripartite school system in some German *Länder* and its abolition in others) is also a significant issue at both a national and local level. It is important to remember that variation within nation states is often as great as that between them, and this provides many opportunities for comparative analysis.

Interestingly, social research is less often bounded on the basis of nation states, although some approaches are geographically located, as with the USA and European phenomenological traditions. More often, ontological or epistemological distinctions, disciplines or sub-disciplines, allegiance to specific theoretical or methodological frames or work within specific fields of inquiry are invoked in boundary setting; as before, in each case it is worth asking what purpose is served by constructing boundaries thus. And with, for example, inter-disciplinary research, there are many opportunities for seeking ways to dissolve boundaries.

Comparative work, in particular, provides opportunities for escaping socially constructed boundaries. Whilst individual researchers bring different agendas and

histories, international teams can provide a '*third space*, which enables other positions to emerge' (Rutherford, 1990, p. 211). This is a productive space for negotiation; for renewal, creativity and innovation in ways which cannot be imagined separately by the individuals involved (Bhabha, 1996). It is a space not in which to seek consensus, but rather to open up possibilities through, 'the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in [different voices] ... pregnant with potential for new world views' (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 360). And where agreement is not possible, this provides opportunities to further explore difference. This, then, is another response to the question, why compare?

Relational pedagogic research in practice: validity and the epistemic relation

It should be clear from the foregoing discussion that the make-up and organisation of research teams are important, particularly with respect to the cases being compared and the rationale for doing so. How teams are constituted and work together contributes greatly to the nature, legitimacy and limitations of research outcomes; that is, the epistemic relation between findings and the pedagogy they seek to explain. Much of my involvement in comparative pedagogy research has been with teams comprising researchers from each of the countries being researched because we sought to compare pedagogy across nation states differing at a societal level in the dominant education ideologies promoted by laws, government frameworks and the like. Recognising that the separation of data generation and analysis is neither easy nor useful, and that the focus of our comparative perspective is social activity, we decided that both the primary data generation and the initial analysis should be done by researchers fluent in the national language and familiar with situational factors and wider influences, but who might also bring other experiences to bear in understanding minority worldviews. Subsequent analyses benefited from collaboration between researchers familiar with national contexts and those whose experience lay in other national contexts, as this supported the identification and analysis of how common themes were mediated nationally and locally. Broadly, our approach to data generation and the initial analysis attempted to provide a degree of cultural validity, 'an appreciation of the cultural values of those being researched' (Morgan, 2005, p. 1, cited in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007), which we addressed in processual terms by seeking to advantage the possibilities for researchers to share understandings with participant teachers and students. As individual researchers within national groups initially analysed data separately before comparing their analyses, we could consider internal validity on the basis of these comparisons; internal validity increased as the similarity of findings across separate analyses within national groups increased (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This also allowed a consideration of construct validity, when initial categories generated in the analysis were similar across researchers, and final categories remained persuasive as they were applied to new data (Cohen et al., 2007). Nevertheless, differences were

viewed positively in providing an opportunity for discussion; although there was no expectation that all difference be resolved, those that were helped enhance the internal or construct validity of findings. The term validity is used here to indicate, specifically, our confidence in the relevance of findings to and beyond the settings in which data are generated; that is, more broadly, the epistemic relation between findings and pedagogy.

I have indicated already how notions of cultural validity are complicated. In this regard, there were other ways in which we took researchers' experiences into account. Those who were middle-class ethnic nationals had limited familiarity with migrant and working-class communities. And experienced ethnographers felt inexperienced when reviewing quantitative studies. Thus our approach emphasised collaboration and we sought some diversity of experience across the research team as a whole when researchers were first recruited. But this was particularly the case with regard to the researcher's relation to the research focus: schooling. Given the ever changing demands placed on them, the current work of teachers was, to some extent, unfamiliar even to those researchers who were once teachers themselves. I have already described how researchers sought to work closely with participants, using methods of data generation which attempted to remain close to classroom processes and participant experiences; and teachers were engaged in a process of participant validation (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992).

To allow consideration of internal and construct validity our approach made use of Weber's notion of 'ideal types' (Crotty, 1998; Weber, 1949). These are formed by describing and interpreting the characteristics of a given phenomenon (in our case teaching) and so stress elements common to most cases rather than corresponding to all of the characteristics of any one particular case. Researchers observed teaching and interviewed teachers immediately after, asking open questions to allow teachers to elaborate on critical incidents identified in the observations and attempting to avoid imposing the researcher's interpretations on them. Next the same researchers worked first individually and later in collaboration to categorise the data and develop descriptions of teaching in terms of a number of ideal types, highlighting for further discussion areas of agreement, disagreement and uncertainty. These ideal types were related to Bernstein's (2004) views on pedagogic discourse. At the outset we decided to use Bernstein, and before commencing the data generation spent much time discussing without closing down our differing interpretations of his work across the international team. This involved some reference to the origins and assumptions of his theories. In the process of developing ideal types, variations in the usefulness of his theories to illuminate contexts were noted. For example, the proportion of uncategorisable data using Bernstein varied between England and Denmark; one reason for this was that it was harder to separate the Danish teachers' activities using his notions of instructional or regulatory discourses than the English teachers'.

At this stage the ideal types were presented to the teachers involved for their comment and areas of agreement and contention were noted. We considered it useful for researchers to have the opportunity to observe teaching in and discuss each

of the national contexts being compared. This allowed them some basis on which to contextualise data and initial analyses of ideal types, which were then shared with the whole research team. Danish data transcripts were translated into English (the Danish researchers could all speak English well), and bilingual researchers ensured its veracity and highlighted areas of ambiguity and potential mistranslation. So, researchers familiar with different national contexts now collaborated, bringing their interpretations to review each other's work, and again areas of agreement, disagreement and uncertainty were highlighted for later discussion. We did not ask the Danish researchers, for example, to develop their own categories from the English data or vice versa, not only for reasons of practicality, but also to avoid separating (and setting boundaries between) these processes of data generation and analysis.

Weber stresses that one cannot claim validity for an ideal type in terms of a reproduction of or a correspondence with social reality; rather one has to look, as we did, to the resonance of ideal types with lived experience, guiding the social inquirer in their consideration of real life cases to reveal what is 'possible and adequate' (Weber, 1970, p. 323). Therefore the construction of ideal types cannot be separated in the data analysis from their subsequent application as a lens for understanding everyday social activity. This is how they act as a bridge between generalising and recognising uniqueness in social inquiry. Ideal types cannot be considered in isolation; they only make sense through their use as a tool for viewing real life and comparing cases (Weber, 1949). Crotty (1998) points out that, in using the notion of ideal types, researchers must be cognisant of the need to avoid providing causal explanations for social phenomena. We did so by maintaining that ideal types are metaphorical and not literal constructs, which provide insight though their comparison with actual classrooms. Hence researchers now returned to apply the relevant idealised national category systems to their own, each other's and new data sets, in each case noting the degree of fit as an indication of internal and construct validity. Throughout, variations in cultural practices were identified, including participants' willingness to discuss certain issues in interviews. For example, English teachers were more reticent than Danish teachers in discussing whether aspects of their roles linked instruction and nurturing students. Finally researchers worked together to compare the similarities and differences across ideal types and their reapplication to national data, allowing areas of particular situatedness and more general resonance to be identified. In keeping with the separation and then combination of national data in this method, our findings were published separately in Nordic (Dorf, Kelly, Pratt, & Hohmann, 2012) and British (Kelly, Hohmann, Pratt, & Dorf, 2013b) journals and then together in a comparative journal (Kelly, Dorf, Pratt, & Hohmann, 2013a).

As we made cross-national comparisons, we also considered questions about similarities and differences in interpretation. Thus we tried to form a 'third space' where the interpretations and worldviews of researchers bringing different preferred ways of knowing were shared in an open and inclusive manner, avoiding favouring any single worldview. So, whilst English provided a shared language and common literature to act as a basis for our cross-national research collaboration, we tried to

counteract the ways English privileged access for some and particular worldviews by deliberately looking to Danish and German ideas and literature as well, differences in translation were examined and differences in interpretation were considered. For example, we looked to German and Danish literature to explore humanist views of schooling and, in particular, how notions of *Bildung* conflated the subject and personal development of students. Nor did we assume that researchers and research ideas, which increasingly move freely across countries, are converging on a single worldview. Instead we sought to recognise difference as well as similarity, allowing for negotiation without closing down possibilities of interpretation and analysis. Sometimes negotiations led the group to converge, adapting (or recontextualising) one perspective to their purposes or constructing a new perspective together. At other times the group were unable to reach consensus. For example, the socialisation of students in Denmark was considered to fall within regulatory discourse by some English researchers because it was seen to concern the management of behaviour, and instructional discourse by some Danish researchers because they linked it to subject development through *Bildung*.

Researcher positionality in comparative pedagogy

Relational accounts allow one to explore the politics of everyday life and the exercise of influence. In this article I have sought to understand relations of power in comparative pedagogy and, specifically, to identify the implications of researcher positionality in processes of data generation, analysis and validation. I have suggested researchers are neither outsiders nor insiders but co-participants in social research activity. They work with teachers, students and other researchers to better understand teaching and the discourses and circumstances which regulate it, learning together through a shared apprenticeship (Lave, 2011).

Thus far I have used validity specifically to indicate confidence in the relevance of findings to and beyond the settings in which data are generated. Validity is also an expression of the craft of research (Kvale, 1995). For Sennett (2009), craft is marked by a dedication to good work for its own sake, full engagement in that work and a constant aspiration to improve. It is often best, he suggests, when it is collaborative, when communication is completely open, and when there are shared goals and practices. This is the view of comparative pedagogy I have presented here. It is a view in which the research process and the phenomena being researched are afforded the same status, being theorised and constructed using the same frame. As such, attending to researcher positionality recognises the status, legitimacy and limitations of knowledge claims by understanding both pedagogy and research about pedagogy as contingent on the circumstances in which they each take place.

Acknowledgements

This paper has been developed within the framework of a wider British Association for International and Comparative Education (BAICE) funded Thematic Forum titled Revisiting Insider/Outsider Perspectives in International and Comparative Education.

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